

I. Introduction

A. Background and Purpose

History

The Rainier Valley was first settled in the last part of the 19th Century. The area's exceptional timber stands led to the construction of timber mills, farming, and residential and commercial development. In response to the need to rebuild Seattle after the 1889 fire, J.K. Edmiston constructed a railway into Rainier Valley in 1890 to improve freight hauling in the area. The original Seattle, Renton, and Southern Railway ran seven miles from Seattle to Columbia City, in the heart of the Rainier Valley. Lumber was shipped to Seattle, while finished goods were sent back to Columbia City and the Rainier Valley. The railroad also had the effect of encouraging more settlement into the area. Columbia City was incorporated as a city in 1893 and later annexed into the City of Seattle in 1907. The area saw tremendous growth from 1900 to 1907, when a number of commercial buildings were constructed along Rainier Avenue and summer homes were built near Lake Washington to the east. Although the rail tracks were taken out in 1936 due to conflicts with the automobile, the area continued to grow with the rest of the city. In 1978, the Columbia City Landmark District was established by the City of Seattle, and in 1980 the district was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

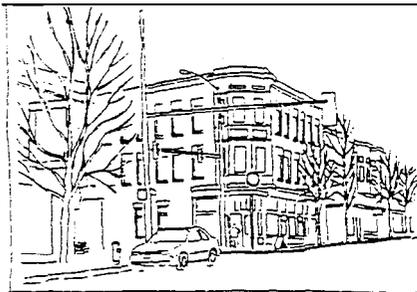


Figure 5: Historic Columbia City

The population of the neighborhood, while primarily African American, Southeast Asian, and white, includes all of Seattle's ethnic groups. Recognized as the area with the greatest cultural diversity, Southeast Seattle currently attracts more immigrants than

any other part of the city. This diversity, however, also means that many residents confront cultural and language barriers to employment and self sufficiency.

In the 1970's and early 1980's, the Rainier Valley suffered the loss of major retail and commercial businesses, including basic retail and grocery stores. The area's economy slowed, and increasing poverty further eroded the commercial base. Over time, these conditions have contributed to a negative image and a perception that the entire Rainier Valley is an unsafe place. While disinvestment persists in locations throughout the area, recent development projects and trends provide reason for optimism. Examples include the Rainier Valley Square development in the *Genesee* area and new businesses and interest in Columbia City. The *Seattle Times* noted in an article on Columbia City on January 3, 1999, that "suddenly people are using words like 'up and coming' and 'trendy' to describe an ethnically diverse, mostly working class district that was all but forgotten until a few years ago.

Growth Management and Neighborhood Planning.

Since early 1995, neighborhoods throughout Seattle have been engaged in **planning** for their future development. These neighborhood planning efforts represent an innovative, grass-roots approach to growth management that encourages neighborhood residents, business owners, and other community members to plan for their own future.

Seattle's neighborhood planning program stems from the Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA), passed by the state legislature in 1990. GMA requires Washington communities to prepare a twenty-year comprehensive plan for their growth. In response to this mandate, the City created Seattle's Comprehensive Plan: *Toward a Sustainable Seattle*, commonly referred to as the Comp Plan. Adopted by the Seattle City Council in 1994, the citywide Comp Plan proposes concentrating growth within the city's existing neighborhoods. The Comp Plan establishes guidelines that allow neighborhoods to develop plans and accommodate growth in ways that protect a neighborhood's existing character, provide for its needs, and enhance its livability.

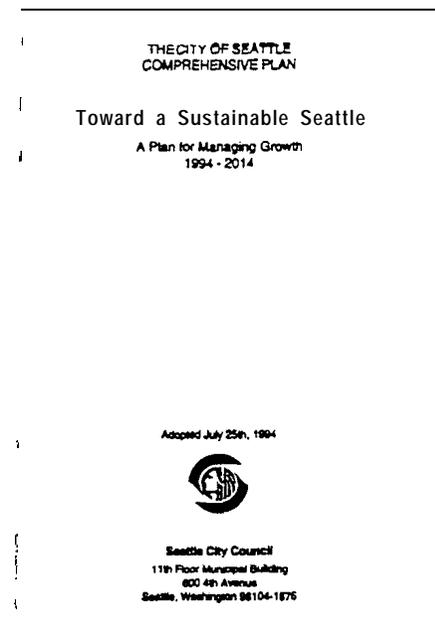


Figure 6: Seattle's Comprehensive Plan established guidelines to allow neighborhoods to develop plans.



Urban Villages and Urban Centers

A basic tenet of the Comp Plan is a concept that concentrates future growth in areas designated as either “urban villages” or “urban centers.” Urban villages are the commercial and residential cores of historically distinct neighborhoods. Urban villages are intended to be relatively dense, walkable communities, served by local shops and services and well connected by transit systems.

Urban centers are larger districts that sometimes encompass several urban villages in dense, pedestrian-oriented communities with direct access to regional high-capacity transit. The University Community is an example of an urban center.

Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee has been designated as an urban village, with planning area boundaries generally encompassing properties along tinier Avenue South from S. Charlestown Street to S. Holly Street, residential areas surrounding the Columbia City business district, and the Rainier Vista Garden Community on Martin Luther King Junior Way South.

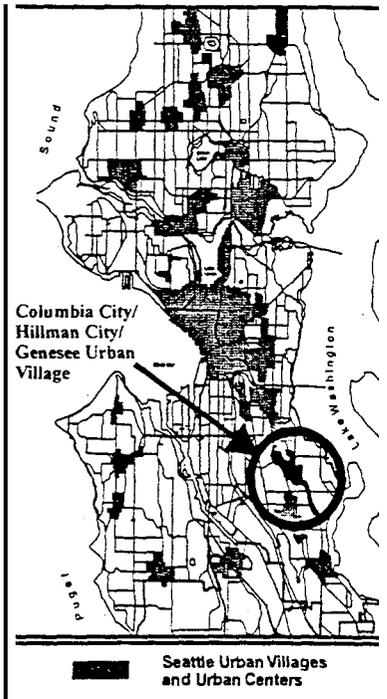


Figure 7: Designated Urban Villages and Urban Centers in Seattle

According to growth targets contained in Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan the Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee neighborhood is expected to absorb approximately 740 additional housing units by 2014. This document outlines the neighborhood’s objectives and priorities for meeting those growth targets while enhancing its unique character and livability. Beyond meeting growth management and Comp Plan objectives, the Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Neighborhood Plan presents an opportunity for the community to define its vision for the future and the actions needed to carry this vision into the 21st Century.

This Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Neighborhood Plan will be submitted to City Council for adoption in early 1999. The adopted neighborhood plan will guide future City policies and the allocation of capital improvements resources in the neighborhood.

| | EXISTING | NEEDED | TOTAL BY 2014 |
|------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Households | 1,450 households | 740 households | 2,190 households |
| Open Space | 21.99 acres | 1.25 – 2.5 acres | 23.24 – 24.49 acres |

Figure 8: Growth Targets Designated by Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan

B. Process

The Neighborhood Planning Office

In 1995, the Seattle Neighborhood Planning Office (NPO) was established as a temporary executive office of the City charged with assisting 37 individual neighborhoods with the neighborhood planning processes. The NPO began working with the Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee community leaders and interested citizens to initiate their planning effort in 1996.

Past Planning Efforts

Prior to the current neighborhood planning process, there have been several recent plans prepared for this area, including:

- **Southeast Seattle Action Plan, 1991.** A steering committee made up of a diverse array of neighborhoods prepared this plan with a neighborhood matching grant from the City of Seattle. The plan focused on actions and strategies to improve the physical and economic climate in Southeast Seattle.
- **Rainier Main Street Strategic Economic Action Plan, 1996.** This plan provided recommendations and strategies for business enhancement, retention, and recruitment for Genesee, Columbia City, and Hillman City business districts.
- **Southeast Seattle Revitalization Plan, 1991.** Landscape architecture students at the University of Washington prepared this plan in cooperation with the Rainier Chamber of Commerce and SEED. It included design recommendations for paths and open spaces, streetscapes, redevelopment pockets, and historical and cultural amenities.

Phase I

The Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Urban Village formally began the first phase of its neighborhood planning effort in early 1997. The purpose of Phase I was to appoint volunteers to organize and prepare the physical plan for the neighborhood's future, and to get as many people involved in the process as possible through outreach activities. Since there have been a number of planning activities in Southeast Seattle over the last 15 years, the first task of the volunteer Organizing Committee was to prepare an issues summary of all the past plans that affected the Columbia City area. The Organizing Committee acknowledged that the Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Neighborhood reaches beyond the urban village boundaries identified by the

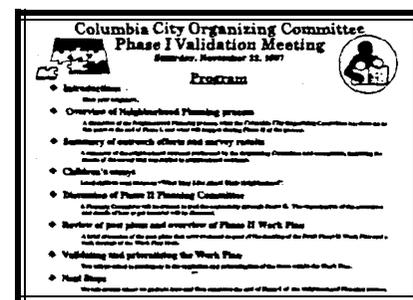


Figure 9: Public Notice for Phase I Workshop



City's Comprehensive Plan. Phase I outreach efforts included people who live and work within a mile radius of the residential urban village boundaries. Outreach activities included:

- Interviews with the business community conducted by the Columbia City Revitalization Committee;
- A community-wide survey completed by over 400 people;
- A speaker's bureau aimed at informing non-English speaking and other hard-to-reach groups about the planning process;
- A youth neighborhood photography project whereby youth, ages 8-16, were asked to take photos of places in the neighborhood they felt needed to be improved and what they would recommend to be done to make positive change happen;
- An issues forum attended by approximately 80 people;
- Validation event attended by approximately 80 people.

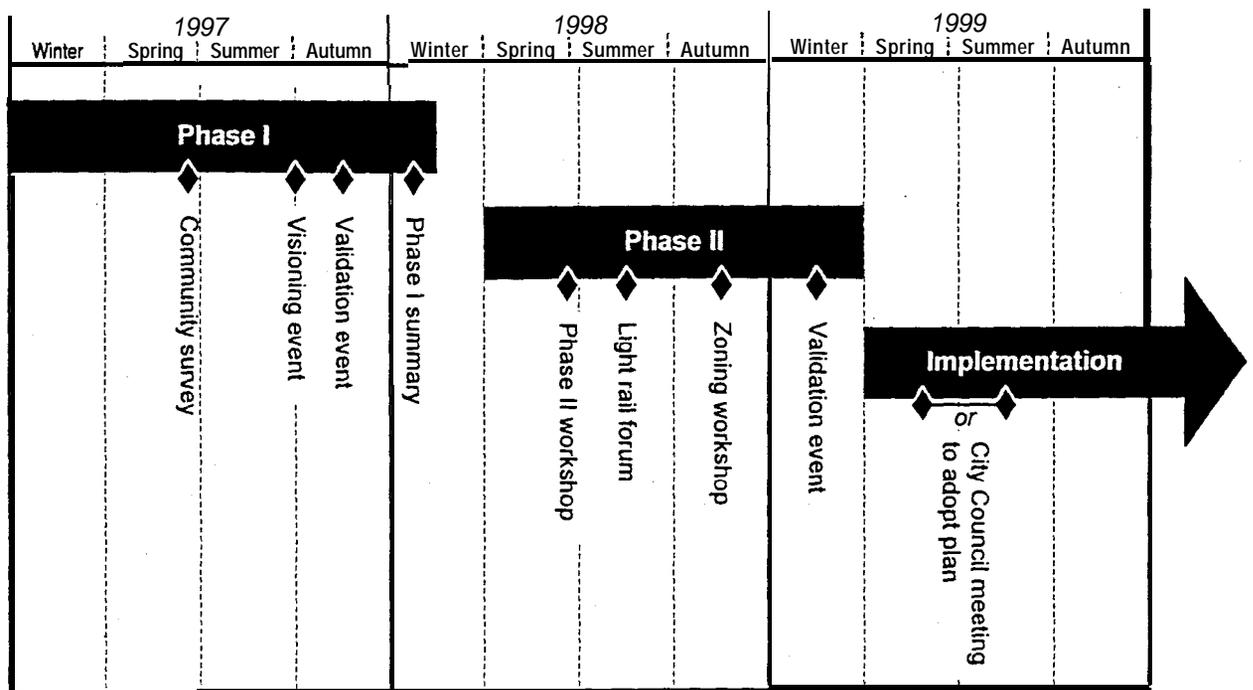


Figure 10: Timeline for Columbia City Neighborhood Planning Process

Through these activities, approximately 500 people were involved in determining the priority issues within the Columbia City area. The business interviews involved 50 businesses, social service, and community groups. The Columbia City questionnaire was completed by 422 people and was followed up by an issues forum with 80 people in attendance. Phase I culminated in November, 1997, with the Validation Celebration, which was attended by over 80 people of all ages.

From this work, the Organizing Committee developed a vision statement, decision process and criteria, and overriding goals and principles.

Phase II

Phase II began in May 1998 with the formation of the Planning Committee and Housing Subcommittee to develop the major elements and strategies of the plan. A public workshop in June began shaping those issues into specific proposals for the neighborhood. During July, the Planning Committee conducted a Light Rail Forum to discuss the constraints and opportunities associated with several light rail route and station alternatives. In November, the Planning Committee conducted a zoning workshop based on ideas generated at the June public workshop and by the Housing Subcommittee. The feedback from all of these meetings has helped to further define the priorities and strategies of the plan.

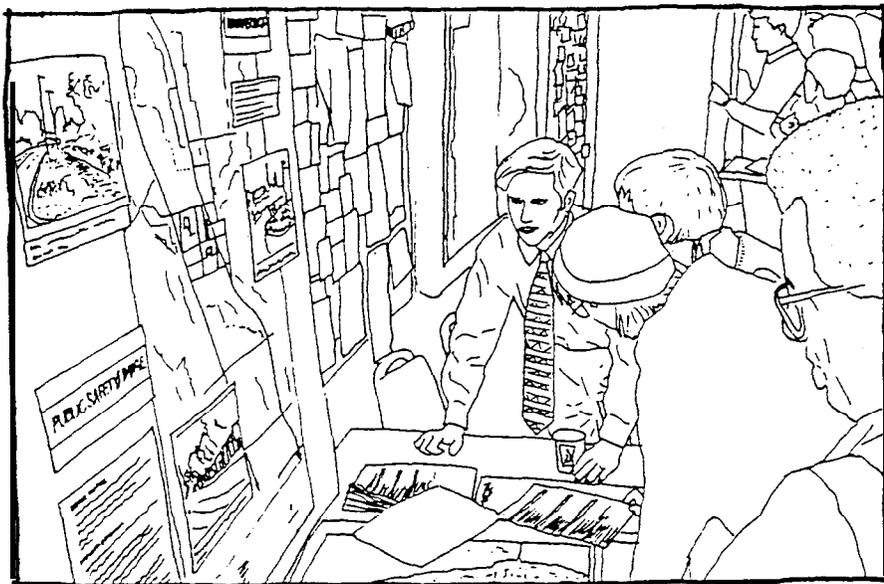


Figure 11: Phase II Public Workshop



The Planning Committee and consultants conducted two open house “Validation Events” in January, 1999, to culminate the second phase. Both events were very successful, with approximately 70 people attending. Both events included short presentations of the plan, question and answer periods, and open house periods. Merchants and residents were given opportunities to voice their opinions on the proposals both at the validation event and through surveys on the validation mailers that were sent out to all mailing addresses within the Planning Influence Area (which includes all properties within the planning area boundaries and other properties within close proximity to the planning area). The public input from the validation event and surveys predominately “validated” the plan’s recommendations; only minor changes to the plan were necessary as a result of the community’s response.

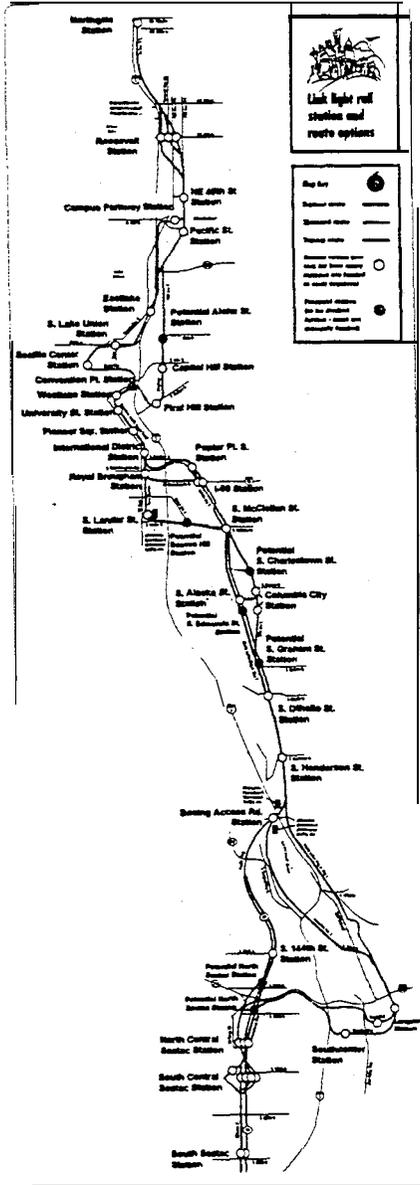


Figure 12: Sound Transit Light Rail System Options

Light Rail Transit Planning

Implementation planning began in May 1998 for a regional transit system, including a planned light rail line with a station to be built in the Columbia City area. The Columbia City area is unique among all other station area communities in that there have been numerous alignment alternatives and station locations. The Planning Committee conducted the following activities in response to the transit alternatives:

- Met with Sound Transit representatives to review alternatives.
- Developed a set of criteria based on community goals and objectives for Sound Transit to utilize for their route/station selection.
- Identified transportation and land use options, potential impacts, and mitigation measures associated with each of the light rail transit alignment and station alternatives.
- Conducted a light rail forum to evaluate how each of the light rail alternatives meet the criteria established by the committee.
- Provided results of the light rail forum along with community recommendations.

The Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Neighborhood Plan identifies important planning concerns that will need to be considered as the detailed station area planning process takes place in 1999. With the exception of the underground Columbia City transit station location (Edmunds/37th Avenue), this plan does not include specific zoning recommendations associated with the alternative station locations. Should a station be constructed within the MLK corridor or at Genesee or Charlestown, specific zoning recommendations should be made in conjunction with the detailed station area planning process. The goals, policies, and strategies of this plan should be utilized in the station area planning decision making process.

Unlike this neighborhood planning effort, which was community-driven, the Station Area Plan is led by Seattle's Strategic Planning Office and a citizens' advisory board consisting of community stakeholders.

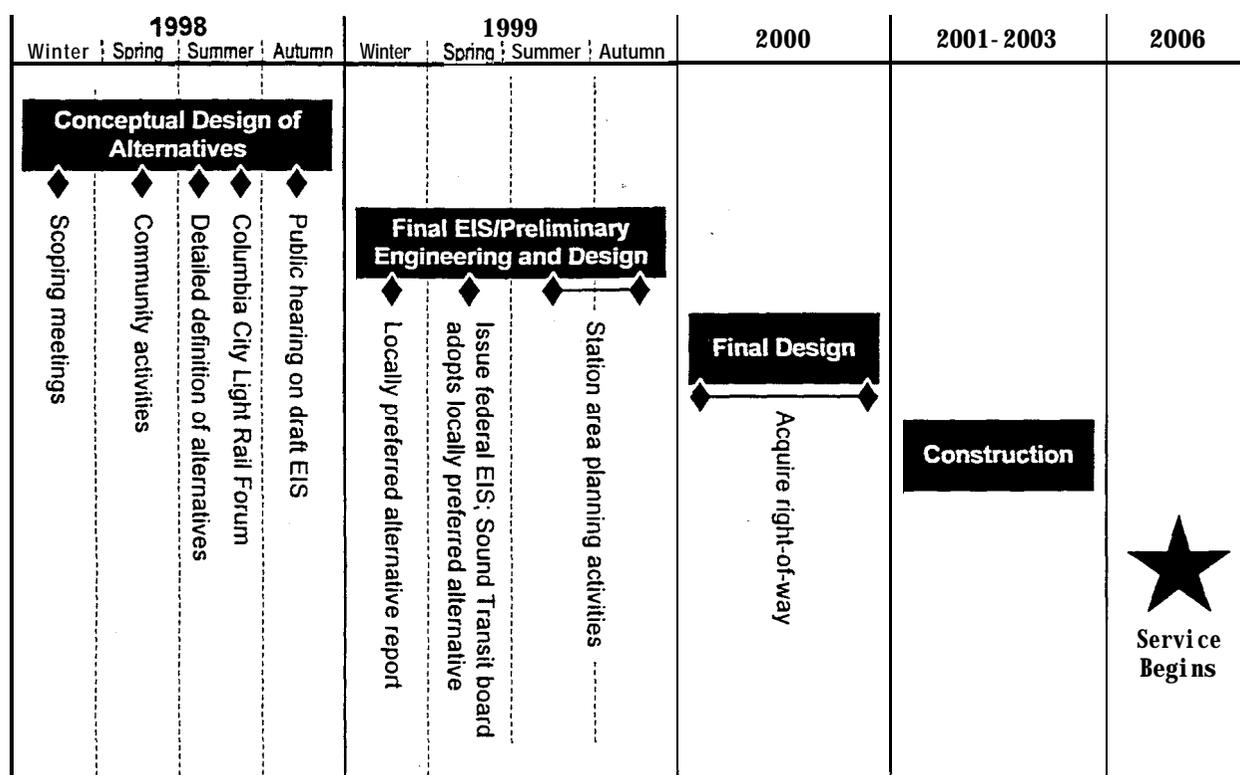


Figure 13: Sound Transit's LRT Timeline